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THE VALIDITY OF A SINGLE ENCOUNTER MINISTRY  
" WITHIN THE URBAN SETTING

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
Claremont School of Theology

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Religion

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by  
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June 1967

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## INTRODUCTION

The church is coming to realize that many of the methods used to establish relationships within the church and dialogue within the community for the past fifty years no longer apply to many areas of secular life. For example, it has become evident that the church is relying upon curriculum material designed for a two-year period in areas where a majority of the families may only be in the community for one year.

Possibly it is time to seriously challenge, theologically and practically, the basic patterns and educational structures of the church and its efforts at outreach. The church, for instance, should be willing to acknowledge the fact that it can no longer base its entire ministry upon long term, week by week encounters with members through its preaching, church school procedures, and small group tactics.

The mode of ministry set forth in this thesis is a result of the author's attempt to become engaged in a listening stance within the inner city. In the process of becoming a listener, and after experiencing a number of significant encounters with individuals at various locations, it became apparent that a style of ministry could possibly be developed that would allow the church to begin

to establish fresh lines of communication within the city. At the same time it became evident that the opportunities for communication provided by the single encounters could be considered a mode of ministry in themselves.

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe a mode of ministry which has gradually been developed as a result of an attempt to closely examine the inner city complex. The following proposed ministry is based on the idea that an individual is capable of reaching a significant depth of involvement on the initial meeting with a person, and that an intensive single encounter may offer a valid means by which to minister to the unchurched. It is not the intention of the author to de-emphasize the value of the long-term patterns of the church's ministry, but rather to point out the need to consider the value of one-time encounters by challenging the tendency of the church to rely only upon long range methods.

This suggested style of ministry may ultimately provide opportunities for lay participation in various forms of witness, but due to the limited scope of research, this writer is only able to project a ministry that would require clergymen in clerical garb to function in specific areas.

The research for this study is based primarily upon an experimental ministry undertaken by the author over a

two-year period in the downtown area of Los Angeles. Two days a week were devoted to becoming involved in the bars, restaurants, and small hamburger stands in various sections of the city.

Chapters I and II are an attempt to show that the physical setting and atmosphere of city life is increasingly becoming a pattern of living that conflicts with traditional long-term methods of establishing dialogue between church and community. The first chapter suggests that isolated single encounters must not be considered secondary ways of experiencing meaning in dialogue for modern man. The second chapter stresses the fact that it may be futile for the church to continue to rely only upon traditional modes of evangelism in reaching the unchurched.

Chapter III describes in detail the counseling possibilities of the intensive single encounter. By way of the psychological and therapeutic disciplines the qualities of the single encounter are interpreted.

Chapter IV emphasizes the importance of beginning at the level of a "ministry of presence" in order to begin to understand the inner city complex and to provide the basis for a single encounter ministry.

## CHAPTER I

### PERSONAL CONTACTS IN THE URBAN STREAM

#### Analyzing points of contact in the urban setting

The church must begin to understand fully the physical and emotional flow of human traffic in the modern urban world. Serious psycho-sociological studies should be made of the inner city complex; viz., business firms and person-to-person contact between employees; pedestrian traffic and the opportunities for personal encounters that arise on the sidewalks; shopping center complexes, etc.

The architectural design of a building, for example, can play a significant part in creating or destroying patterns of personal interaction for the urban man. Business establishments and working conditions are often not conducive to developmental patterns of conversation or contact. Larger business firms cause workers to meet increasingly greater numbers of individuals for shorter periods of time. Obviously, the modern business world does not permit a person to establish an authentic relationship with his co-worker during working hours. Theo Crosby, in Architecture: City Sense, claims that

in architectural terms it is important that building should promote identity: that is, the individuality of each citizen. They should also promote social involvement, the opportunity for contact at every



level and thus help towards the efficient functioning of the city.<sup>1</sup>

Crosby, in writing about the architectural quality of the city, describes the network of human contacts that are created by the urban environment. He writes,

The city, too, has the virtue that it provides a proper relationship between private and public life. In a city one is not anonymous for very long. There is a fine network of public involvement with local tradesmen and neighbors, greetings, noddings and occasional exchanges, while the basic privacy of the individual is undisturbed. Public life is further extended in work and recreational association, so that an individual is always within a web of contacts, of infinite variety and degree, each of which produces responses and involvements. These involvements create, ultimately, social responsibility, and are a most valuable social education. Unless each citizen is able to participate fully in this complex world, to feel himself part of it, and responsible to it, his life is lonely and he remains undifferentiated.

For everyone wants to be somebody, needs an identity. Identity is a complex phenomenon, but one acquires it by virtue of action, appearance, and above all, involvement. The city is the great stage, the citizens actors; each one has a role to play in the great drama of everyday life.<sup>2</sup>

The initial undertaking for an evangelistic program --that of becoming familiar with the city's activities and the flow of human traffic--is too often taken for granted by the church. This phase of the ministry, however, must

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<sup>1</sup>Theo Crosby, Architecture: City Sense (New York: Reinhold, 1965), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

not be taken for granted, for the success of any form of outreach will be determined by the thoroughness with which the city patterns of life are studied.

The church must attempt to gain a perspective of the flow of life within the limits of the urban community, and determine realistically the individual's movements in his weekday activities. It is essential to view the urban man's daily habits completely and to get beyond the traditional image of seeing the working man leaving the house in the morning and returning in the evening.

Transportation, eating, and recreational facilities are designed to keep persons moving at an increasingly faster pace. The modern airport complex with its automatic doors, conveyer belt walkways, escalators, closed-circuit TV, etc., reveals the future trends of urban living, and the limited points of human contact that are in store for man. The person-to-person contact found within our ultra-modern air terminals may indicate the direction in which other establishments intend to move in the future. Harvey Cox points to this trend in The Secular City where he says,

Every tendency in modern society points to accelerated mobility. . . . The modern city is a mass movement. It has been described by one writer as a kind of staging area where people pause in their complex movements from one place to another. Not only do we migrate between cities in search of improvements but we migrate within cities to find more convenient or

congenial surroundings. Commutation represents a small daily migration. We commute not only to work but also to play, to shop, to socialize. . . . Urban man is certainly in motion, and we can expect the pace and scope of mobility to increase as time goes on.<sup>3</sup>

The church needs to discover, therefore, every possible point of contact between individuals in the city, from a physical embrace to a passing glance, in its effort to discover where it will encounter the urban man on the move.

The church must look more closely at the quality of personal encounters that the individual experiences within his work world and the degree to which a person relies upon his working hours for intimate contact with others. David Riesman's observations regarding the office girl's personal relations is significant at this point. He says,

Despite an urban milieu, white-collar girls seldom have the resources, educational, financial, simply spatial, to vary their friendship circle and their recreations. Grasping at glamor, these women are driven to find it in their work time, in the boss and in the superstructure of emotions they weave into the office situation.<sup>4</sup>

Riesman uses the term "false-identification" to describe the underlying motivations for personal relations in white-collar employee-employer relations.

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<sup>3</sup>Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 266.

The personalization is false, even where it is not intentionally exploitative, because of its compulsory character: like the antagonistic cooperation of which it forms a part, it is a mandate to manipulation and self-manipulation for those in the white collar ranks and above.<sup>5</sup>

Riesman claims a manager for a firm may be compelled to relate on a personal basis with the office force in order to accommodate a system which has assumed the values of personalization to gain greater efficiency.

Riesman goes on to reveal that the only alternative to entering into the trap of "false-personalization" is to wear a completely alien work mask. The "inner-directed" individual or strong-willed self-reliant man overcomes this temptation by treating the co-worker as something other than a person.

The motivations for operating on a personal level at the office have become complicated by the value systems of big business. It is difficult, therefore, to discover the points of genuine personal contact at the office, but it is apparent that the average office-worker or salesclerk cannot rely upon his or her work hours for satisfying a need for well-established long term relationships.

Department store clerks are required to encounter shoppers in business-like fashion. At the turn of the century the sales clerk worked at a slower pace due to the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

limited stock and the slowness of the trade, and consequently she encountered customers who were not rushed or anxious over their choice of items. The salesgirl was therefore exposed to a customer for a longer period of time. Today the department store clerk confronts a mass clientele that moves at an increasingly faster pace, and she can no longer afford to become fully acquainted with the customers. In 1900 the salesgirl was able to recall the sizes and tastes of her limited clientele, and consequently she maintained a restricted but continuous dialogue with a few customers.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to analyze the actual time an individual will have to encounter a person if he so desires. It is evident that the work day for the average person in the modern world is limited to brief meetings, and whether a person wishes to spend a considerable length of time with another employee or not, chances are he will have little opportunity to do so.

In a majority of the industrial firms a person is faced with an even greater problem when it comes to finding time to become acquainted with a fellow employee or to establish a significant relationship. On an assembly line, for example, it is generally physically impossible to

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

exchange more than a few words with a fellow worker. In fact, in many plants a worker on a production line will go for hours before he is able to sit down and relax.

Harvey Swados, in commenting on "The Myth of the Happy Worker," discusses the dissatisfaction found among assembly line men with their working conditions. He claims that most of these men are

sick of being pushed around by harried foremen, sick of working like blinkered donkeys, sick of being dependent for their livelihood on a mechanical production-merchandising set up, sick of working in a place where there was no spot to relax during the twelve minute rest period.<sup>7</sup>

Swados goes on to indicate the dilemma of finding a long-term relationship with a fellow assembly line employee when he reveals that

since the assembly line demands young blood, the factory in which I worked was aswarm with new faces every day; labor turnover was so fantastic and absenteeism so rampant, with the young men knocking off a day or two every week to hunt up other jobs, that the company was forced to over-hire in order to have sufficient workers on hand at the starting siren.

Cox, in referring to the "I-You" or functional relationships, implies that man cannot rely upon brief encounters for acquiring the level of intimacy that is sought for in meaningful human contacts. He gives the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 111-112.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

impression that unless one can meet the supermarket checker or the gas-meter reader consistently and for longer periods of time or in other contexts, then these contacts must be considered to be secondary encounters and consequently hopeless in terms of meeting man's need for primary relationships.

Cox charges that Buber does not cover clearly the area of functional relating, and therefore Cox feels it is necessary to establish a middle category between I-It and I-Thou, viz., "I-You." I would contend that by not suggesting this middle term Buber indicates that man needs to be open to the possibilities of encountering elements of the I-Thou in his limited contacts as well as his long-term relationships. Buber would argue that man needs to remain in the tension that exists between I-It and I-Thou encounters. Man is always faced with the possibility of I-Thou in the functional. This is not to say that he must seek to extend that relationship but that man should never enjoy the comfort of a third category.

Cox, by pressing for privacy in the city and avoiding I-Thou contact in functional encounters, is asking the urban man to resist the process of secularization by continuing to nurture long-term relationships apart from his normal pattern of life. In other words, rather than attempting to extract something of meaning from quick

contacts to feed his long-term relationships Cox is suggesting that the urban man bypass these and concentrate on developing the long-term contact only.

The urban man does not have to cultivate an I-Thou relationship with everyone in the city, as Cox seems to fear, but the urbanite may need to expose himself on the I-Thou level in a fragmented sense in order to survive in the city and to maintain the deeper I-Thou relationships he cherishes.

While the urbanite is physically close to large numbers of people, he is never face-to-face with an individual in the same sense that the typical rural resident encountered his neighbor or grocer. The face-to-face relations experienced by the rural individual were rooted in a "horizontal" plane--a plane that was dependent upon a continuous string of interactions. That is, the villager relied upon the security that comes with knowing that a particular individual would be available for an unlimited amount of future encounters. The rural man found meaning in the promise of future meetings, and he adapted himself to a linear plane of intimacy.

Within the process of urbanization the urbanite gradually adapts to a "vertical" plane of intimacy. He senses the need to relate to his fellow man on the spot and not to rely upon a continuous series of encounters for



cultivating intimacy. The process of urbanization undercuts the developmental aspect of relating and forces man to rely upon isolated "instantaneous" moments of intimacy, and whereas man once relied upon a quality of involvement to know his neighbor, he must now opt for a quality of instantaneous interaction. He can no longer move toward long-term contact in closed circles; therefore, he must be satisfied with quick-quality contacts on an open-ended scale. Where man once cultivated a few relationships to rely upon as a resource of love and meaning to be tapped periodically throughout his lifetime, he must now attempt to extract that same quality of love from an infinite number of lives. Georg Simmel, in describing the nature of "The Metropolitan Mental Life," points out how our mental condition can shift from a rural unconscious orientation to an urban conscious orientation. He writes:

The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer stimuli. Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts--all these use up, so to speak, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life,

the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to sensory foundations of psychic life.<sup>9</sup>

Simmel continues on to say that the slow mental imagery of rural life flows more evenly than that of the urban life rhythm. But he also suggests that the rural man would experience a quality of life that is more deeply felt and that the village relationship was encountered on a much deeper emotional level than would be experienced in the city. He claims that "the reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality."<sup>10</sup>

Simmel's urban life observations ought to be challenged at this point on the grounds that possibly the urban man does not lose the depth of encounter in his mental shift from country living. Perhaps Simmel's theory is based on a "horizontal" plane of intimacy and he is overlooking the possibility that the urbanite is capable of experiencing a brief but deep relationship with another person on a radical vertical level of intimacy, and although the urban man may not have the benefit of extending his relationships on a quantitative basis, he may still

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<sup>9</sup>Eric and Mary Josephson (ed.), Man Alone (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 152.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

enjoy the quality of intimacy felt by his rural counterpart.

Shift from rural contacts to urban contacts

If I grasp the essence of what Marshall McLuhan is saying in Understanding Media correctly, his view of man in the electric age would support a "vertical plane of intimacy" concept of dialogue. He asserts that man has entered an age where he becomes spontaneously and deeply exposed to phenomena within his environment. Modern man experiences his surroundings instantly and completely. McLuhan would contend that Western man has passed beyond the evolutionary stage of existence where man "reacts with his head instead of his heart," as Simmel states, to a point where he is capable of reaching the depths of human existence without first having to move toward a phenomenon. Whereas man once approached a subject in order to understand its content, discover its significance, and become influenced by it at a distance, he now, upon being exposed to the subject, encounters an instant total awareness.

McLuhan counters Simmel's contention that rural man had a superior means of relating through his slow unconscious flow of experiencing life. McLuhan writes:

In the mechanical age now receding, many actions could be taken without too much concern. Slow

movement insured that the reactions were delayed for considerable periods of time. Today the action and the reaction occur almost at the same time. We actually live mythically and integrally, as it were, but we continue to think in the old, fragmented space and time patterns of the pre-electric age.<sup>11</sup>

McLuhan claims that the technological age allowed the surgeon, for example, to perform operations with a detached attitude to avoid becoming emotionally involved. Man was capable of dealing with crucial social issues by approaching them with complete detachment. He comments on this behavior.

Our detachment was a posture of noninvolvement. In the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate in depth, in the consequences of our every action. It is no longer possible to adopt the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner.<sup>12</sup>

In McLuhan's estimation a completely new environment has been created, and in this electric age the "medium is the message." Man in this environment resists having patterns imposed upon him, and he is seeking to encounter totally the human beings that present themselves within his world. He suggests that man has passed through a phase in which automation has placed him over and against

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<sup>11</sup>Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

machine and man and his new role allows him to experience a depth of involvement in his work and with his co-worker --an involvement that was impossible in the mechanical technology of yesterday. Electric man is freed from the machine age to enter into new realms of intimacy.

Riesman maintains that the processes of capitalism, industrialism, and urbanization have induced a mode of behavior in man that has caused him to become "other-directed." In other words, in order to cope with the impact of metropolitan life the urbanite assumes a role that will help him combat these impersonal processes. Riesman, like Simmel, prefers to treat this as a negative characteristic of socialization, and he shows how this feature in man leads to a shallow existence. The "new" middle class other-directed person adjusts his behavior to meet the approval of his contemporaries. This new orientation, Riesman admits, demands a highly sensitive apparatus for receiving signals, and it must assimilate rapidly changing bits of information. The individual does not formulate and internalize a new code of behavior, but rather he develops an elaborate apparatus for meeting these needs.

Riesman stands with Simmel in assuming that the new urban breed is incapable of functioning at a meaningful interpersonal level of existence. He says,

While the inner-directed person could be "at home abroad" by virtue of his relative insensitivity to others, the other-directed person is, in a sense, at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of rapid if sometimes superficial intimacy with and response to everyone.<sup>13</sup>

We are considering, then, the fact of shallow roots and the seemingly superficial relationship to life that the urbanite cannot avoid. In a very complete study of modern suburbia, William H. Whyte, in The Organization Man, comments on "the new roots" of suburban living. He claims there is a new type of rootedness emerging in these settings that offers a positive quality of existence. The suburbanite must maintain a "professional" attitude in dealing with suburban relationships. They tend to refrain from sinking their roots because they know that in a short time they will be moving to another community. There is also an emotional shock that is risked in becoming involved.

On the other hand, however, they cannot forever wait for the eventual home, for they do not know when, if ever, they will find it. They must, in short, make a home of the home away from home, and to accomplish this feat they must act in the present.<sup>14</sup>

By deciding to act in the present and sink what might be called "temporary roots," the suburbanite differs

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<sup>13</sup>Riesman, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>14</sup>William H. Whyte, The Organization Man (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), p. 328.

from the rural man in that the former must endeavor to relate to his neighbor in a more radical sense than the villager, for he knows that he cannot rely upon the linear quality of relationship that is promised in the rural setting. "Once adjusted to the mobile life, transients say, they find as much stability in the new kind of roots as in the old, geographical ones."<sup>15</sup>

The Organization Man is credited with having the ability to withstand the constant changes of the technological age by learning to adjust readily to ever new conditions. In his adjustable, interchangeable role in society he has managed to engage in meaningful community life. In the conclusion of his book Whyte presents the question, where is the Organization Man headed in this age? He states that no one seems to know, and it appears few people are even raising the question. In the present age it seems man is less inclined to be concerned about his destiny and may even sense that he is not in control with respect to a direction for society. "Most see themselves as objects more acted upon than acting--and their future, therefore, determined as much by the system as by themselves."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 437.

Whyte warns against the dangers that come with giving in to the system, but at the same time he commends the efforts of the new man who is able to sustain the impact of urbanization. In my estimation he has described those qualities of human existence that have experienced an evolutionary change in the twentieth century; and granted that man must endeavor to stand up to the system, he must also appreciate and come to understand that part of his being which is affected by a universal growth process. But Whyte seems to be expressing a greater fear of the system's development than a respect for an advancement in human evolution.

It is important at this stage to set forth the theme of Teilhard de Chardin's writings and his concept of psychic evolution, for he implies that modern man has entered a phase of existence which has altered completely our concept of life. If we keep in mind McLuhan's contribution which tells us we now experience life in greater dimensions, we will better understand the essence of Teilhard de Chardin's concept with respect to this chapter. Simmel and Riesman pressed the fact that modern man bypasses the depth of human relationship when he reacts to life on a rational level, but rather than treating this observation with regard to an evolutionary perspective, they remained on a static level of comparison on a purely



sociological scale. Teilhard de Chardin is able to describe why modern man may respond with his "head and his heart" when he writes:

Evolution is now, whether we like it or not, gaining the psychic zones of the world and transferring to the spiritual constructions of life not only the cosmic stuff but also the cosmic "primacy" hitherto reserved by science to the tangled whirlwind of the ancient "ether."<sup>17</sup>

He sides with McLuhan in the following remark:

Through the discovery yesterday of the railway, the motor car and the aeroplane, the physical influence of each man, formerly restricted to a few miles, now extends to hundreds of leagues or more. Better still: thanks to the prodigious biological event represented by the discovery of electro-magnetic waves, each individual finds himself henceforth (actively and passively) simultaneously present, over land and sea, in every corner of the earth.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, then, the rapid pace of urban living has given shape to a new mode of relating between men. A careful examination of the patterns of human interaction will indicate that the urbanite is faced with having to rely upon the degree of intimacy that is developed in brief exposures to others.

It is becoming evident that man has moved, or is in the process of moving, from an emotional era where he experienced a limited number of contacts for an indefinite

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<sup>17</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 219.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

period of time to an age in which he experiences an unlimited number of meetings with an infinite number of persons. It would seem that such a shift would tend to deprive man of a significant depth of human involvement. The manner in which man is affected by this change will determine, of course, his ability to meet his need for intimacy in his new context. The emotional change, therefore, must be considered on the level of an evolutionary progression and not merely in terms of a sociological shift.

Attributing the emotional change to an evolutionary level of human nature in one sense may be considered a highly questionable concept or presupposition for attempting to understand the dynamics of relationship in the urban setting. On the other hand, in order to begin to anticipate the trends of urban life, and to develop a significant and relevant mode of ministry for the future, it will be necessary to seriously consider the possibility that man today may be deeply affected by the pace of life in which he finds himself.

## CHAPTER II

### SINGLE ENCOUNTERS AND THE CHURCH

#### Moving beyond the gathered setting

In the inner city it is evident that the mainline churches are not equipped to enter directly into dialogue with the residents and workers of the city. The church has tried various methods to draw persons within the immediate vicinity of the church into its facilities in recent years, but in most instances it has sought to operate out of a small group orientation or priest-to-pew confrontation. There has been very little experimentation with person-to-person encounter beyond the church building, and often when there has been an attempt to meet persons within their own setting, it is done in an effort to encourage them to attend services or meetings at the church.

The church in its approach to the unchurched remains chained to rural concepts of relationship, and its curriculum and strategy within the city for the most part do not reflect the fact that modern man encounters a life that is radically different from that of his ancestors. The church has merely fought to retain its old forms of establishing dialogue by speeding up the long-term process rather than looking for new ways to relate directly to the unchurched.

If a church retreat is placed on the calendar, it is usually done so not as a single experience but with the thought of carrying out a program that will eventually guide persons into a long-term pattern of fellowship. And if participants do not follow up the retreat experience by becoming involved in weekly functions, the retreat is considered a complete failure.

The church has endeavored to discover ways to confront the unchurched as a part of a plan to offer an invitation to Christian discipleship, and only after the potential member responded to this gesture by actually coming to the building did the church feel satisfied that it had offered an effective form of evangelism. This orientation may be causing the church to overlook the fact that a valid evangelistic high point may be reached at the initial meeting. Possibly the optimum point for dialogue with the unchurched is created by the encounter and not through the follow-up to the invitation to church membership.

We can understand this tendency to cling to rural methods of relating when we learn that "56.9 percent of the membership (national Methodist Church) has been reared in rural areas of cities under 100,000 population."<sup>1</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Lee, The Church and the Exploding Metropolis (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 63.

is also reported that

Protestant clergymen have come largely from rural communities and the middle or lower middle class. Indeed, in the nineteenth century this was where most of those who entered urban professions were born, for the population was still predominantly rural; the remarkable fact concerning the Protestant ministry is that the pattern has persisted so long.<sup>2</sup>

The structure of our urban churches needs drastically to be reshaped, in part by the process of urbanization. "The need for structural reform of the city parish constitutes one of the major research issues in the sociology of the parish."<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Wieser in Planning for Mission sees the need for a total transformation of organizational patterns and mental attitudes before the church can become an effective missionary force in the modern world. He claims the church has regarded itself as an institution that needed to include the entire population within its boundaries.

Consequently, their 'the churches', prevalent outlook became an inward one: tending the flock for whom they could not possibly imagine any other place to be than inside the well-defined corrals of institutional religion. However understandable this Constantinian turn of mind may be in the perspective of past conditions, in our contemporary situation of a thoroughly secularized social order it is just obsolete. Yet, up to the very present, the overwhelming majority of church people (of leading and of rank and file status alike; and including ourselves!) appears to persist in

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

it. Consciously or unconsciously, we are always haunted by the spectre of unchurchliness and dechristianization, by the loss of influence of institutional Christianity manifest in declining membership rates and ebbing interest in religious activities of all sorts.<sup>4</sup>

Wieser relates that the church has responded to this condition by making the parish life more attractive in an attempt to regain its institutional stance within the world. In doing so, the church tends to press for faithful churchgoers and loyal joiners, implying that the Kingdom of God is served best in this manner. Wieser warns that "the real challenge we are up against is not how to counter the more or less apparent estrangement of modern man from institutional Christianity, but how to bring home to representatives of the latter that it is they who have lost contact with the actual areas of human responsibility."<sup>5</sup>

Wieser indicates that the church is not a part of the important decision-making groups in society, and although it presumes to know the answers to the questions faced by modern man, it in fact is not in a position to offer many solutions. "These answers can only be touched upon by entering into a sincere dialogue with the determining forces of present day urban-industrial society."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Wieser, Planning for Mission (New York: World Council of Churches, 1966), pp. 200-201.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Murray Leiffer, author of The Effective City Church, claims that the church needs to discover new modes of ministry that are not limited to the structures of congregational life. He writes:

It is not enough for the church simply to multiply its local congregations; ministers, laymen, and particularly administrators must be prepared to rethink the functions which the church should perform and methods for making it more effective.<sup>7</sup>

Urban or suburban churchmen who are interested in becoming involved in mission or outreach to inner city people need to realize that their evangelistic approach must be geared to the everchanging living, working, and leisure conditions of the city. For the most part the basic sociological facts of city living have not been assimilated by the church, and the churchman has entered the urban scene with images that are completely incongruous to city life.

The churchman should realize, through his own experiences with city living and working conditions, that the urban man cannot be approached in the same manner he was approached by the church yesterday because he is now moving at a much greater pace. The churchman is unable to relate his secular experience of urban life to the context of the

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<sup>7</sup>Murray Leiffer, The Effective City Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 42.

Christian tradition and, therefore, he is unable to meet his urban brother at a meaningful level of existence. The churchman has rather continued to ignore his secular contribution and operated out of packaged church patterns of evangelism.

It has been difficult to conceive of a significant ministry taking place on a personal basis outside the walls of the building. It would seem that the task of the church in the inner city ought to be that of leading lonely individuals out of the urban industrial world and into its community, but when the characteristics of loneliness in the city are analyzed, it becomes apparent that providing a group for the lonely individuals is not the only answer to this problem. Langmead Casserly, writing on the "Religious Conceptions of the City," claims that:

Many secular and religious urban activities are devoted to alleviating this sense of loneliness. Churches and religious organizations are often valued as community centers where people can become acquainted. Yet the primary purpose of an urban spirituality, and the work of the church in urban areas, cannot be to give back to men what urban life takes away from them. For the replacement of what is lost is not sufficient to consecrate what we have. The real task of spirituality and religion is to consecrate and exalt the values of city life. Spirituality and religion must find some way of giving ultimate meaning to city life by transforming its activities so that they can be dedicated to the greater glory of God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Lee, Cities and Churches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 62-63.



Consecrating the values of city life for some churchmen will mean opening wider the doors of the sanctuary, while others will contend that consecration takes place only when the lonely individual becomes an active participant in the worship service and church life in the traditional sense. Others will argue that the secular individual will encounter consecration only after he has met consistently with a small Koinonia fellowship and been exposed directly to the Scriptures. Some will defend the idea that a layman or clergyman may become a catalyst in the process of consecration by encountering the individual within his own setting on a one-to-one level of commitment. This writer would hold primarily to the latter concept.

The culture lag between the church and city living will not begin to close up until the church is ready to accept the accelerated pace of urban life as it actually exists, and then begin to find ways to cope with the change. The community-oriented image within city churches, then, would need to be dealt with realistically. A Catholic professor of sociology, in writing about "Church Strategy in the Metropolis," warns the church against retaining the communal concept of functioning in city churches. He claims that

the typical American urban Catholic parish is not a social group in the technical sense. It is a secondary, associational type of collectivity rather than

primary communal group. Father Schuyler, in his study of Northern Parish prefers to call the parish a social system, and there seems no good reason for quarreling with this terminology. I would agree that the "restoration of community," about which European Catholics seem greatly concerned, is an unrealistic approach and probably a forlorn hope.<sup>9</sup>

The churchman must overcome the idea that the only true Christian witness is brought about alongside other Christians, out of small group action.

The church is reluctant to rely upon any method of discovering God in fellowship apart from the nurturing process. Robert Raines reveals the traditional image of conversion found in the church when he writes:

Those who have grown up in Christian homes, whose parents have shared real Christian marriage . . . Their conversion began imperceptibly, unsensationally, quietly. And one day they learned to sing in remembrance, "Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew," for in months and years of such "breathing," they were being awakened by God.<sup>10</sup>

Raines goes on to suggest that the most effective atmosphere for conversion--where the Holy Spirit is working--prevails in "koinonia groups centering on Bible study."<sup>11</sup>

The church is unable to free itself, in its

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<sup>9</sup>Lee, The Church and the Exploding Metropolis, p. 101.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Raines, New Life in the Church (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

outreach program, from the gathered community and the maturation process long enough to consider alternate ways of encountering the work of the Holy Spirit. It is tied to this concept, and it has sought to emphasize the need to reach the unchurched by exposing them to structured personal interaction, implying that any activity outside of the "family" would be considered secondary encounter and consequently not as meaningful as the programmed meetings.

Raines points out that the church's "conventional structure is not geared to enable people to come into deep personal relationship" and he indicates that the answer to the lack of depth in the church is the small group approach. I would grant that the koinonia fellowship will provide the means for man to encounter his neighbor at a meaningful level, but the church does not have to insist upon moving only in the direction of continuous personal interaction in order to reach the level of intimacy sought within the Christian tradition.

Raines touches upon the quality of relating and turns from the developmental aspect of encounter for a moment when he refers to the weekend retreat concept of meeting.

A retreat can be a time of awakening, remarkable in power and possibility for the participant. Personal and corporate breakthroughs occur which simply would not have taken place in the normal course of events.

Telescoping into two days the hours of sharing which might otherwise have taken weeks drives the personal relationships deep.<sup>12</sup>

### Recognizing the value of a single meeting

If we were to compress the telescope once again, we would begin to focus upon the "instantaneous" quality of encounter and the breakthroughs that may occur when the exposure is compressed into a single meeting.

The instantaneous encounter is crucial to urban man because he is no longer in a position to maneuver himself about in a deliberate attempt to control his relationships and he is forced to depend upon tenuous segmental encounters. Louis Wirth states:

While on the one hand the traditional ties of human association are weakened, urban existence involves a much greater degree of interdependence between man and man and a complicated, fragile, and volatile form of mutual interrelations over many phases of which the individual as such can exert scarcely any control.<sup>13</sup>

The characteristics of city life, e. g., the high mobility and anonymity traits emphasized by Harvey Cox in The Secular City, indicate the futility of the church's attempt to superimpose the traditional week by week, year by year structures of Christian orientation. Cox claims

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<sup>12</sup>Robert Raines, Reshaping the Christian Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 30-31.

<sup>13</sup>Lee, Cities and Churches, p. 31.

that "people on the move spatially are usually on the move intellectually, financially, or psychologically."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps it is time to draw attention to the quality of a relationship rather than the length of time that is spent with a person. Possibly the degree of intimacy sought in many long range church meetings can, in some instances, be reached in the first meeting.

A study on single young adult outreach undertaken by a mainline church in Denver, Colorado, indicated that "one shot" retreats were effective in reaching urban young adults who were unable or unwilling to become involved in weekly Bible study classes or similar long-term activities. This was a concentrated effort designed to leave a strong impression on the participant. There was no deliberate intention to guide the person toward church involvement, but rather the thought was to meet the individual's immediate needs.<sup>15</sup>

Intensive single encounters between the clergy and the unchurched may provide a mode of ministry that will begin to open lines of communication between representatives of the church and the outsider. Before this form of

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<sup>14</sup>Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 53.

<sup>15</sup>Robert A. Dow, "Action-Research, 1964-1966" (Denver, Colorado: unpublished study for the First Baptist Church, 1966). (Mimeographed)

evangelism can take place, however, the churchman will have to resist attempts to enroll the unchurched and become satisfied with an encounter with the outsider.

Theodore Wedel deals with ways the gospel may be communicated to those outside the church. He uses the term "incarnational evangelism" to denote the style of witness that is needed in this age. Wedel discusses a form of evangelism that involves the laity's move toward the outsider.

French evangelistic literature has brought to the fore three words that summarize by way of three successive steps the church's mission strategy. The three words are: presence, service, communication (give them the honor of French pronunciation, and they escape the handicap of shopworn familiarity). Incarnational evangelism is first of all the presence of the church in the world. Though not much has been said in this exposition of service (diakonia, or "deaconing"), presence and service are intimately related. Communication, however, must wait until its hour has come. Witness to the gospel must win the right to be heard.<sup>16</sup>

Wedel has suggested a method of evangelism that will enable the church to overcome an aggressive stance in the world--a posture that has tended to block communication with the unchurched--and at the same time an approach is being presented that will bring the churchman and the outsider face to face. Incarnational evangelism indicates

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<sup>16</sup>Theodore Wedel, The Gospel in a Strange New World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 72.

to the outsider that the church is willing to approach the unchurched for purposes of knowing and understanding and not for the intention of proselyting. This sort of evangelism would also communicate to the outsider that the church belongs in the world.

The need for new modes of ministry are certainly not limited to the urban scene. The following question is taken from a comprehensive report on "A Christian Ministry in Yellowstone National Park" compiled by John A. Lee, director of the project. He asks, "How can we be the church in a national park without the traditional 'vessels' of Sunday services, church schools, youth fellowships, ladies' guilds, etc.?"

Lee goes on to comment in the report on the problems that arise when young churchmen attempt to witness within the park by drawing upon traditional approaches to outreach.

We bring these young people into the park, acquire them positions with the various concessionaires, and turn them loose to be the church in Yellowstone. For the most part they do a highly commendable job. As they enter the situation of a national park, however, where there is no established church structure to buttress or work through to desired goals, in order to implement a relevant ministry the students draw upon their past experiences to build a church fellowship. This means first imposing all the usual patterns of a church bureaucracy upon a very transient community. When these vessels don't work, secondly the students spend a lot of time figuring out what is wrong and what can be done to

adjust the machinery of the church (find new vessels) to their new and different community.<sup>17</sup>

Lee concludes this section of his report by suggesting that a bar ministry be initiated in the park area. He says,

For a number of seasons I have been thinking about a new form of ministry to reach those persons we will never have an opportunity to talk with through ordinary church channels or "vessels". I am thinking of a tavern ministry. Without question, a community of 500 people that can fully support six bars and no churches, the people that need what the Christian church has to offer are going to be found in the pubs.<sup>18</sup>

A comment by Joseph Richter, writing on "Church Strategy in the Metropolis: a Roman Catholic Viewpoint," illustrates the need to consider a single encounter mode of ministry. He remarks that the Church representatives (clerical and lay) need to reach the masses of people beyond the church by finding new channels for witness.

The direction of the relationship is changed; instead of the people coming to the Church, it is the Church going to the people. One can make co-operative demands of parishoners in a stable, urban, middle-class parish, but this does not work where there are few parishoners or many disinterested unchurched persons.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>John A. Lee, "A Christian Ministry in Yellowstone National Park" (Montana: unpublished study for the Methodist Church, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Lee, The Church and the Exploding Metropolis, pp. 97-98.



### Confrontation between the believer and unbeliever

The clergyman through a single encounter ministry may function in one of three basic ways. First, he may be thought of as the vehicle in which a spiritual substance is carried from the Christian community to the unbeliever on the secular scene. The unbeliever in this case would merely receive or reject that which is being offered by the believer.

The second manner in which the clergyman might influence the unbeliever in the intensive encounter approach is by merely offering himself as a "catalyst" to the relationship. In other words, the unbeliever may be thought to have a latent faith that is capable of being stimulated under the right conditions. The minister in this case would meet the individual face to face for purposes of activating a dormant religious conviction.

The third consideration--the one most likely to be operative in the intensive encounter--is one in which the clergyman enters into an encounter which in itself may become the koinonia experience. Both men are responsible for contributing to the experience by engaging in an intensive face-to-face relationship.

The third concept seems to be in line with what is being called for in the recent studies on "The Missionary Structure of the Congregation," authorized by the Third

Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961, and set forth in the book, Planning for Mission. Under a section dealing with "The Experiment in the Church" several trends were observed, which are being encouraged by the study committee. Among the trends are the following:

- 1) Discovery of the fact that without confrontation and engagement in the world (theology of incarnation!) faith withers.
- 2) The conviction: God speaks to Christians not only in worship services, but also in encounter with contemporaries and with present events.
- 3) Experiments arise when Christians discover the diaspora in a secularized world.<sup>20</sup>

The intensive single encounter, then, may provide the opportunity that is needed for an individual to enter into what Lehmann refers to as the "koinonia." Within the encounter a person may experience a degree of maturity. "Maturity is a traumatic experience compounded of deliverance and fulfillment. In short, maturity is salvation."<sup>21</sup> "The Christian koinonia is the foretaste and the sign in the world that God has always been and is contemporaneously doing what it takes to make and keep human life

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<sup>20</sup>Wieser, op. cit., pp. 155-156.

<sup>21</sup>Paul Lehmann, Ethics in a Christian Context (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 99.

human."<sup>22</sup>

Essentially, what I am pressing for in suggesting that the intensive single encounter approach be set up as a mode of ministry is the fact that I believe the quality of dialogue experienced during those intense moments of interchange within the secular world may reach the depths of human relationship that are desperately being sought in many of our long-range group experiences within the church. This is not to suggest that the latter approach needs to be re-examined, but that perhaps we need to examine more carefully through experimental ministries the points of contact that exist between the secular world and the church. "For all ministry is primarily a ministry of relationship or it cannot bring men into saving encounter with the redeeming God. All of us need this salvation, all of us are needed for this ministry of salvation."<sup>23</sup>

The theological foundation for the single encounter ministry would include Lehmann's presupposition that

Both believer and unbeliever belong to Christ. Both believer and unbeliever are promised in him the secret and the power of maturity. Both believer and unbeliever are being confronted, in the environment

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>23</sup>Reuel Howe, Man's Need and God's Action (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, 1962), p. 80.

being shaped by Christ's royal and redemptive activity, by the decision to accept or to reject the conditions of a new humanity on Christ's terms, not their own. The difference is that for believers, as members of the koinonia, the kingship of Christ is revealed; in the world (that is, among unbelievers) it is hidden. The church lives as the people who know that the victory has been won. The world lives on as if nothing had happened. The church realizes that the powers which militate against God's plan are under control. The world lives on as if these powers were still able to shape the ultimate destiny of men. The difference between believers and unbelievers is not defined by church membership, or even, in the last analysis, by baptism. The difference is defined by imaginative and behavioral sensitivity to what God is doing in the world to make and to keep human life human, to achieve the maturity of men, that is, the new humanity.<sup>24</sup>

The believer encounters the unbeliever in an effort to reveal to the latter that both creatures experience a new humanity in the same manner, but not with the same understanding. The encounter itself must communicate to the unbeliever that both men are being shaped by the same forces in life, but that their interpretations of those forces will differ. The single encounter approach is not a direct attempt to alter or transform the life of an alcoholic or dope addict in one sitting, but rather it is entered into for the purpose of becoming involved with the individual at a level that would indicate to him that the believer experiences life not unlike that of his counterpart. The encounter would hopefully affect the

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<sup>24</sup>Lehmann, op. cit., p. 117.

alcoholic's world of meaning, not with the intention of moving him toward a sober state, but with the hope of affirming existing threads of meaning in his life.

The search for a new mode of ministry

The direction of the ministry which I am about to propose grew out of an attempt on my part to gain a better understanding of the urban man by encountering him face to face within his own setting. A year ago, while serving as a staff member of an inner city church, I sensed the need to somehow become familiar with persons in the immediate vicinity of the church. I felt it was essential to become "present" in the city for a while, to become a listener, and to learn where and in what capacity I could possibly serve as a minister.

A fairly systematic approach was undertaken over a one-year period to ascertain where it might be possible to encounter individuals face to face. Within the downtown area of Los Angeles there are four distinct sections of the city (within a one-mile radius of each other) that provide a cross section of humanity and a challenging evangelistic opportunity for the inner city churches. These areas amount to specific streets that have, for socio-economic and various other reasons, become definite compartmentalized segments of society and consequently

almost completely isolated from each other.

On the first street one discovers shoppers entering and leaving the department stores, dress shops, shoe stores, and numerous other buildings. The downtown shopper moves at a very rapid pace and is seldom caught standing idle. He only pauses at the busy sales counter long enough to receive his sales slip, and when he is halted by the traffic signal on the corner, or in waiting for his bus. The shopper rarely frequents the theatres located among the stores along the boulevard, and he would prefer to eat his lunch at a stand-up counter, rather than spend the time being waited upon in a sit-down restaurant.

In my experience, finding a convenient place to encounter the shopper has been one of the most difficult tasks in the downtown ministry. There appears to be virtually no opportunity for meeting the shopper face to face for any significant length of time. Possibly the only alternative the clergyman will have to cope with the shopping pace will be to become a part of the sales world and attempt to encounter the customer under these conditions.

A small sidewalk flower stand operated by a man receptive to the single encounter idea became the location wherein it became possible for me to sell flowers on occasion and to become open to dialogue with the shopper.

This particular setting was not conducive, however, to the "intensive encounter" (the encounter which is capable of being reached in the bar or restaurant in other sections of the city). The flower stand and a small sidewalk cafe adjacent to the stand did become important places for analyzing the temperament and movements of the downtown shopper.

The next street that comes to one's attention will seem at first to be deserted, but at certain times of the day the pedestrian traffic on this street will appear not unlike that of the shoppers. This street is lined with office buildings and banks, and would include lawyers, bankers, secretaries, clerks, etc. Unfortunately, the only opportunity for contacts in this area would arise during the coffee break and lunch hour periods. I have found the business executive difficult to encounter in some respects because he will not be inclined to approach me in the sight of his colleagues. The most convenient locations for meeting the business man on a personal level have been in the bars that are located at some distance from the business section.

The third street for one's consideration is patronized primarily by the derelict, and would be comprised of the prostitute, the dope addict, the homosexual, etc. This section of the city is generally feared and

consequently avoided by the average citizen. This area can offer convenient locations for intensive single encounters, especially within the bars and small hamburger stands.

The final section of Los Angeles to be considered in the study is referred to as "skidrow." This area is made up of persons who are seeking help that would demand immediate practical attention, such as food, clothing, or medical care. Within this setting, where immediate needs are so great, it is extremely difficult to encounter individuals at a level of meaning. The Fifth Street or "skidrow" person approaches the clerical collar for reasons which are quite different from those of the Main Street derelict. The latter is inclined to approach the clergyman for purposes of dealing with meaning in his life, while the former is primarily concerned at this point with satisfying his physical condition.

I soon discovered that the USO Club could provide the setting necessary to become a listener. The club's refreshment area offered the atmosphere needed to allow me to be "present." I then widened my approach by locating a restaurant, two bars, and a hotel lobby in the same area that offered convenient spots to encounter persons under informal conditions. The managements were receptive to the idea when they learned that I did not intend to approach



the customers and that my ministry was dependent upon the individual's desire to approach me.

I found that the most effective way to enter into dialogue was by wearing a clerical collar and sitting at a convenient place within the bar or restaurant until being approached, and making it a point not to take the initiative. A definite pattern of dialogue emerges in these encounters. Frequently, the person begins by talking about his past experience with the church, and this in turn leads to talk about the family. Gradually, the person refers to his present situation.

The ministry of "presence" eventually became a ministry of "encounter"; more specifically, it became a ministry of "single encounters." After experiencing a number of intensive meetings at these various locations, I began to reflect upon the following questions: Does the minister need to enter these sites with preconceived ideas on where or how to eventually guide the individuals he encounters to a gathered community? Is the clergyman in this capacity primarily representing himself as a person or the church as an institution? How valid is a single encounter within the Christian tradition?

The clergyman, if he wishes to encounter the urban man at a significant personal level of interaction, will have to rely upon single encounters and resist the urge

to press for a commitment to the church. The single meeting will be justified if either person within the encounter has learned something about the other, if what takes place in those few moments of dialogue is open, honest, and spontaneous. The clergyman must enter this ministry with the understanding that it is crucial to operate out of immediate feeling and not have a hidden agenda.

The minister approaches the situation, not as one who intends to be the counselor, or the one with the answers, but as an individual who is willing to risk whatever is demanded of him on the spot as a person to become engaged in meaningful dialogue. Although a commitment is not required from the individual beyond the initial meeting, there is definitely a call for commitment to the immediate moments of interchange, to the short-lived relationship that emerges between the two persons.

The single encounter can become to the person an example of the quality of dialogue every man seeks, and the event itself may provide a lesson on how we discover meaning with others. The encounter may also provide an opportunity for the minister to challenge the responsibility of the person, to force him to look at himself and his responsibility to his life situation. Every pastor ought to spend two days a week for a minimum of one year merely encountering persons in various settings throughout

the city with no thought of seeing the individuals he meets beyond the initial contact.

Engaging in the intensive encounter

It is almost impossible to attempt to enter into meaningful dialogue with individuals whom I see week after week on my "beat." For example, it is difficult to talk in depth to the bartender or persons I have met at the bar more than once. In these conversations we fall into a definite pattern of interaction which does not easily allow for either person to break through. The intensive single encounter calls for a "plunge" at the initial meeting. Every encounter which has reached a significant depth for me has been experienced on the first meeting.

It is possible that an individual establishes a pattern of interchange with a person at the outset of a relationship regardless of the length of time he feels he will be in contact with that person. If one is aware of the fact that this will be a limited relationship, there may be a point in the first encounter at which he decides whether or not he will attempt to be open and as honest as possible before the roles for interacting are established.

In order to maintain rapport within the bar atmosphere, it is necessary to establish a significant relationship with the bartender and to assure him that one is not

evangelizing in the traditional sense or creating a disturbance that would cause him to lose his customers. I have found that the bartender becomes an important interpreter in this ministry, and often he is called upon to explain to a customer, who has questioned my presence in the bar, that I am merely "available" for conversation and that I do not approach individuals at the bar. In the small hamburger stands it is also necessary to become acquainted with the waiter or waitresses in order that they might explain my presence to their customers.

In the process of carefully examining the urban complex the clergyman must anticipate the possibility of entering into a meaningful encounter at any time. The following personal example illustrates the manner in which the encounter may be initiated. After becoming acquainted with the owner and operator of a small hamburger stand on Main Street and obtaining permission to spend Saturday afternoons at the counter, there arose numerous opportunities for encountering individuals. On one occasion a slightly intoxicated, arrogant young adult sitting next to me initiated a conversation which led to an intense and stimulating encounter. After a brief introduction the young adult began to question my presence.

Don: What are you doing in here anyway?

Minister: I come here to drink coffee.

Don: Me too. In fact that's all I ever do--drink! What do you mean you just sit here, don't you have anything better to do than sit around here?

Minister: I have other things to do, but I also like to be here.

Don (Notices me keeping time to the music being played over the jukebox): I see you like that music too. Father, you may be a man of the cloth, but there's something else there.

Don (after a long pause): Hey, let's go some place for a beer.

Minister: What's the matter with drinking coffee here?

Don (hostile response): What's the matter? Are you chicken?

Minister: What do you mean, chicken? Does not wanting to go out for a beer make me a chicken?

Don (No immediate response. After approximately one hour of conversation): Hey, I have a hundred bucks on me, and I sit here drinking coffee with a priest. I could be out finding me a woman or getting drunker. What would you do with a hundred bucks, Padre?

Minister: I'm not sure what I would do with it. Should I know what to do with it?

Don: Let's go out for a beer.

Minister (no comment).

Don: You know, if you were to get rid of that collar, we could have one hell-of-a-good time.

Minister: What could we talk about over a beer that we couldn't talk about right here over coffee?

Don: O.K., Padre, you win. (He motions to the waitress.) Bring us two more coffees. (We toasted with our cups and continued talking.) I could tell you some things that have happened to me in my life that would make your eyes pop out.

Minister: What was the idea of trying to get my goat earlier?

Don: I'm not sure, but I've known some priests that would shed their collars. (Long pause.) You know, Padre, I don't find much meaning in what I do any more. I'm a merchant marine. I just got paid, and I don't know what I want to do. How's that for a mixed up sailor?

Minister: Don, what do you think is going on in our conversation?

Don: I can't quite put my finger on it, but you know I would rather be talking like this more than anything else?

It was evident in our conversation that Don was dealing with his attitude toward the church--the Catholic Church, in this instance--and that he found it necessary to test my patience and sincerity throughout the conversation. Several times in the course of the discussion he wanted to know what I was thinking. It was important in our dialogue for me to vent my hostility toward him on those occasions when he deliberately attempted to irritate me. In the process of deciding whether or not I could be trusted, he questioned in Spanish the waitress regarding my presence and intentions. The waitress defended me and indicated to him that I could be trusted.

Martin Buber describes a quality of dialogue that is definitely a characteristic of the intensive encounter, and one that is very difficult to communicate to the reader. I quote at length an example of how two persons within an intensive single encounter might experience one

another in a moment of silence.

Imagine two men sitting beside one another in any kind of solitude of the world. They do not speak with one another, they do not look at one another, not once have they turned to one another. They are not in one another's confidence, the one knows nothing of the other's career, early that morning they got to know one another in the course of their travels. In this moment neither is thinking of the other; we do not need to know what their thoughts are. The one is sitting on the common seat obviously after his usual manner, calm, hospitably disposed to everything that may come. His being seems to say it is too little to be ready, one must also be really there. The other, whose attitude does not betray him, is a man who holds himself in reserve, withholds himself. But if we know about him we know that a childhood's spell is laid on him, that his withholding of himself is something other than an attitude, behind all attitude is entrenched the impenetrable inability to communicate himself. And now--let us imagine that this one of the hours which succeed in bursting asunder the seven iron bands about our heart--imperceptibly the spell is lifted. But even now the man does not speak a word, does not stir a finger. Yet he does something. The lifting of the spell has happened to him--no matter from where--without his doing. But this is what he does now: he releases in himself a reserve over which only he himself has power. Unreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbor. Indeed it was intended for him, and he receives it unreservedly as he receives all genuine destiny that meets him. He will be able to tell no one, not even himself, what he has experienced. What does he now "know" of the other? No more knowing is needed. For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally.<sup>25</sup>

The single encounter ministry needs to be understood as a valid form of ministry in itself within the Christian

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<sup>25</sup>Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 3-4.

tradition and not as a learning opportunity only. In order to fully understand the effectiveness of this kind of ministry, it will be necessary to emphasize once again the fact that isolated single encounters need not be considered secondary ways of experiencing the unchurched and to point out that it may be futile to try to impose only long-term patterns of dialogue.

Perhaps the church has reached a point in its history in which it must discover ways to merely listen to the urban man. Georg Simmel has stated that "since such forces of life have grown into the roots and into the crown of the whole of historical life in which we, in our fleeting existence, as a cell, belong only as a part, it is not our task either to accuse or to pardon, but to understand."<sup>26</sup>

Gibson Winter indicates that the church is ready for a ministry of learning and listening when he writes, "Despite enormous expenditures of money, as well as trained clergy, modern religious paraphernalia and high-powered mimeograph machines, the churches have failed to communicate a Christian understanding of life in the American

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<sup>26</sup>Eric and Mary Josephson, Man Alone (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 165.



community."<sup>27</sup> Winter reveals why it is necessary for the clergy to stand on the other person's ground to listen. "The load of personal, pastoral care increases day by day, but the forces that create these problems become daily more remote from the pastor in the residential community."<sup>28</sup>

In Cox's terms the encounter ministry would fall into the area of Koinonia and Diakonia, for it is primarily a ministry of engagement and service, with the emphasis upon the former. The encounter ministry is made up of commitments to individual relationships or interactions, and not to a task. The encounters would differ from counseling situations within the church building, mainly because the clergyman would be confronting the individual within his own environment and on his own terms. It is significant that the person has not gone to the church to encounter the priest, and that the priest does not approach the person, but that the individual takes the initiative in confronting the priest by approaching him in the secular setting.

The minister is not there to alter or transform the

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<sup>27</sup>Gibson Winter, The New Creation as Metropolis (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 28.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

community into something else; neither is he there to attempt to transport the existing fellowship to another location. In order to avoid giving the impression that he is there to impose church structures on the persons he meets, the minister must endeavor to allow encounters to happen, and not initiate conversations.

The one-to-one relationships experienced in the bars and restaurants may last for only fifteen minutes, but the quality of relationship experienced in those brief moments may be compared to the level of responsible feeling encountered in many long-term extended relationships. By responsible feeling I refer to that level of experience which causes an individual to respond in an honest effort to hear and be heard. Responsibility to the other is the theme in the single encounter--responsibility for spontaneous reaction and immediate reflex. The individual becomes irresponsible when he enters into the encounter with "premeditated responses."

To summarize, the single encounter ministry represents in essence a service extended by the gathered community, and yet it differs from the social and educational work of the church in that the encounter approach functions at the level of meaning. In other words, whereas the educational work of the church, e. g., the establishment of schools which endeavor to meet an intellectual need,

or counseling clinics which are geared to meet immediate emotional needs, the single encounter ministry would function primarily at the level of meaning. Besides offering a means by which the church could begin to listen and learn on a ground other than its own, it would also offer an opportunity for the church to participate in dialogue with the unchurched at a level which deals directly with the existential level of life.

Although the single encounter approach emerges from the gathered community and becomes an external arm, so to speak, of the church and must not be considered an autonomous effort apart from the community, the encounter ministry embodies an essential value in itself. It may be more appropriate to consider the encounters "spontaneous koinonia experiences" which become linked to the Christian tradition but not immediately responsible to the gathered community.

The individual confronted by the minister within the encounter is not called to become responsible in the future to the gathered community, but rather he is called to remain responsible in the present to the temporary bond of relationship experienced in the meeting itself. The degree of responsibility required to meet the demand within a single encounter may equal the responsibility sought in a long-term relationship.

The value of the single encounter ministry is measured at this stage chiefly by the results of the meetings themselves, but it is entered into with the idea that the encounter may ultimately affect to some extent the individual's decision-making process. Ultimate decisions that involve the meaning of life itself for the individual may be affected by the momentary encounter.

In Chapters I and II it was shown that man has possibly reached an evolutionary stage in his existence which will allow him to extract greater meaning from instantaneous encounters than ever before in the history of man. We have also taken a critical look at the church's present reliance upon long-term programs and considered the need to seriously question traditional modes of reaching the unchurched.

## CHAPTER III

### COUNSELING ASPECTS OF THE SINGLE ENCOUNTER

#### Sensitivity training

We turn now from the sociological characteristics of a single encounter ministry to the intensive encounter itself, as we consider the counseling aspects of the encounter. In order to comprehend the psychological impact that an intensive encounter might have upon an individual we will use the language of the counselor or therapist. We will need to distinguish, however, between the individual who approaches a clergyman wearing a clerical collar within a bar or restaurant, and the patient who has sought out the services of a trained psychologist for purposes of counseling. The former will have approached the minister for various reasons; among them will be the need to deal with the institutional church. A number of persons will approach the clerical collar because it will indicate to them that here is someone who may be open and willing to listen, a representative of the church who is willing to encounter a person on the latter's own terms.

The minister who decides to make himself available in the world through an intensive single encounter ministry may have to undergo a training course that deals

specifically with "person perception." Ross Snyder comments on the sensitive act of perception.

For some years the field of psychology has been increasingly interested in perception since it seems to be so determinative of man's other psychic behaviors--feelings and actions. Methods of re-training our habits of perceiving are being evolved--and these will be helpful to those who very much want to improve their power to see and feel their environment--(people such as business executives or those in training for becoming psychotherapists, or just plain Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Snyder claims "person perception" has become an important area of study in the field of social psychology.

An intensive single encounter ministry will provide an opportunity for two persons to experience a depth of instant relationship that may be impossible to accomplish under normal social conditions. Snyder describes the dynamics of interchange that characterize the intensive encounter.

A person has intentions which his outward behavior often masks until the opportune moment. The depths of a person are not easily perceived. The person being perceived must want to reveal himself to the person with whom he is talking. Even while he talks he is constantly deciding in his mind whether he will reveal or remain opaque. What he is depends upon what he sees. In normal social life there is further complication--both persons are more or less filled with anxiety of the question. "Will this other include me in his world?"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ross Snyder, "The Authentic Life: Its Theory and Practice" (Nashville: The Methodist Church, 1963), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The anonymity that exists between the clergyman and his counterpart in a single encounter eliminates the above question, and the anxiety that is apparent in the average long-term relationship is overcome in the thought that the individual will not have to cope with a trust being broken in an unlimited number of future encounters. There is a sense of relief in the thought that the individual has only to decide for this meeting whether or not he should trust the person he confronts.

Rollo May, in discussing the various levels of communication that are taking place within an intensive counseling interview, indicates that the counselor enters two distinct zones of interaction that need to be understood. He contends that it is important "to apprehend the fact that the technical and diagnostic concerns are on a different level from the understanding that takes place in the immediate encounter in therapy."<sup>3</sup> We are primarily concerned at this point with the latter level of interaction and the ability to press for depth in the meeting. Rollo May agrees with Snyder's contention that a frame of mind or a conscious attitude toward perception is needed to guide the encounter toward significant depths.

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<sup>3</sup>Rollo May (ed.), Existential Psychology (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 27.

Phenomenology requires an "attitude of disciplined naivete", . . . it is not possible, in my judgment, to listen to any words or even to give one's attention to anything without some assumed concepts, some constructs in one's own mind by which he hears, by which he orients himself in his world at that moment. . . . While one must have constructs as he listens, one's aim in therapy is to make one's own constructs sufficiently flexible so that he can listen in terms of the patient's constructs and hear in the patient's language.<sup>4</sup>

The minister, operating on a level similar to the therapist, attempts to enter into the encounters as someone over and against the individual, and yet he must be sensitive and open to the person. Carl Rogers describes the quality of response that is demanded of the therapist in counseling. The minister in the intensive encounter ministry would assume a comparable response.

This would mean that the therapist has been able to enter into an intensely personal and subjective relationship with this client--relating not as a scientist to an object of study, not as a physician expecting to diagnose and cure, but as a person to a person. It would mean that the therapist feels this client to be a person of unconditional self-worth; of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings. It means that the therapist is able to let himself go in understanding this client; that no inner barriers keep him from sensing what it feels like to be the client at each moment of the relationship; and that he convey something of his emphatic understanding to the client. It means that the therapist has been comfortable in entering this relationship fully, without knowing cognitively where it will lead, satisfied with providing a climate which

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 26.



will free the client to become himself.<sup>5</sup>

Within the therapeutic session (I will interject here the fact that I think the same level of dialogue may be reached in the intensive single encounter that Rogers alludes to in the long-term counseling program) Rogers claims there are three responses which will be experienced by the patient in the counseling interview. First, the person will become "open to his experience," which means he will become "genuinely open to the experience of his organism . . . and free to live a feeling subjectively, as well as be aware of it. . . . The crucial point is that there would be no barriers, no inhibitions, which would prevent the full experiencing of whatever was organismically present, and availability to awareness is a good measure of his absence of barriers."<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, "this person would live in an existential fashion. I believe it would be evident that for the person who was fully open to his experience, completely without defensiveness, each moment would be new. . . . Such living in the moment, then, means an absence of rigidity, of tight organization, of the imposition of structure on

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<sup>5</sup>Carl Rogers, "The Concept of the Fully Functioning Person," Pastoral Psychology, XVI:153 (April 1965), 21.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

experience. It means instead of a maximum of adaptability, a discovery of structure in experience, a flowing, changing organization of self and personality."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, "this person would find his organism a trustworthy means of arriving at the most satisfying behavior in each existential situation. . . . He would do what 'felt right' in this immediate moment and he would find this in general to be a competent and trustworthy guide to his behavior."<sup>8</sup>

#### Reality orientation

Viktor Frankl's term "Logotherapy" and William Glasser's expression "Reality Therapy" are helpful concepts in describing the psychological factors that are capable of being reached in an intensive single encounter ministry. Both Frankl and Glasser set forth therapeutic doctrines that coincide with the effects of "instantaneous awareness" that seem to be characteristic of man's relationships in the "Electric Age."

Frankl begins his section on logotherapy by relating a conversation he once had with an American doctor in his office--a conversation which reveals why logotherapy can become a logical method of helping man discover the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

will to meaning in the modern age. The American doctor describes in capsule version what he considers to be the essence of psychoanalysis. He says, "During psychoanalysis, the patient must lie down on a couch and tell you things which sometimes are very disagreeable to tell." Frankl counters this statement with the following remark: "Now, in logotherapy the patient may remain sitting erect but he must hear things which sometimes are very disagreeable to hear."<sup>9</sup>

In logotherapy the patient is not encouraged to reflect upon the past or delve into the reasons for his present condition. The method is neither retrospective nor introspective, but rather it focuses upon the future, and the patient is brought to terms with those areas of his life which need to be fulfilled in the future. "In logotherapy the patient is actually confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life."<sup>10</sup>

Frankl states that the neurotic individual tends to escape the realities of life and avoids becoming fully aware of his situation. By breaking into the patient's pattern of neuroses through means of logotherapy the

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<sup>9</sup>Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 98.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

therapist can awaken the patient to his present condition. "Logotherapy" is a term that implies a systematic approach that endeavors to uncover the meaning of human existence for the patient.

Frankl's insight with respect to the thin line between the neurotic and normal patient is important for understanding the dynamics of an intensive single encounter. His therapy is not limited to the extremely neurotic patient. His process will assist the "sick" as well as the "healthy" in finding meaning in their lives. The intensive encounter approach would assist the sick as well as the healthy person also in discovering something of meaning within a brief interlude. The intensive encounter ministry parallels the logotherapeutic process, and whereas psychotherapy deals with the conflicts between conscious and unconscious forces and adjustment to society, the "logos" oriented methods center on spiritual qualities of the personality and the responsibility to one's immediate future. Frankl sums it up in the following statement: "In logotherapy's attempt to make something conscious again it does not restrict its activity to instinctual facts within the individual's unconscious but also cares for spiritual realities such as the potential meaning of his existence to be fulfilled, as well as his will to

meaning."<sup>11</sup>

The degree of tension brought about by the anxiety one feels when the gap widens between what he has achieved and what he ought to accomplish is a significant aspect of mental well-being. One's will to meaning is stimulated by the conflict that arises with respect to this tension. Frankl claims man needs to overcome a tensionless state of existence by being challenged to face a realistic goal. "What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled . . . so if therapists wish to foster their patient's mental health, they should not be afraid to increase that load through a reorientation toward the meaning of one's life."<sup>12</sup>

I think the degree of tension felt by Frankl to be essential to mental well-being can be stimulated within the intensive single encounter, and that individuals encountered under the right conditions are likely to be more susceptible to an abrupt reorientation because they are being confronted within an anonymous atmosphere of intimacy. Within a downtown bar, for example, I have been approached by several persons who have started a conversation by saying, "I find little meaning in life."

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

The following encounter took place within a midtown barroom. After several minutes of silence a man seated two stools away from me slid over to the seat next to me and initiated the conversation.

John: I drink all day, but I can't get drunk. What do you think of that, Father?

Minister: I'd say you aren't trying hard enough. What would you say?

John: Maybe you're right. You may think I'm nuts, but I come in here to hear the voices.

Minister: What do you mean?

John: Well, you see, my first born son was conceived up on the third floor of this very building. (He motions toward the ceiling.) I haven't seen my children in twenty years, but I've been sending check for child support every month. You know what I mean.

Minister: I'm beginning to understand.

John: Now I just have me and that's not much. I'm going to tell you something I've never told anyone, not even the bartender. I pray every night for death--I pray for life to stop. Why can't I have peace?

Minister: What's peace to you?

John: Peace is seeing my kids.

Minister: O.K. Let's say you get a chance to see them. What would happen?

John: They would probably cuss me out, because I'm no good.

Minister: So what! So they have cussed you out. Then what?

John (approximately thirty minutes later): I'm talking too much!

Minister: No, you're not. What has this conversation

meant to you?

John: It's made me kind of nervous. I've said some things I've never told anybody, but I'm glad I did.

Minister: You keep talking about experiences in the past, but I don't hear you talking about the present or things to come. I have a feeling some of the peace you're looking for is found in talking face to face such as we are doing right now. Now I'm talking too much.

John: I like what's happening here, but it's making me a bit nervous.

On occasions I have encountered persons more than once. Each meeting, however, is treated as though it were to be the one and only opportunity together.

I did not see this person again for four months. Then suddenly he came into the bar, walked over to where I was seated, and sat down next to me. His mother had died and he had gone back east to attend the funeral, and he talked about his feelings over her death. In the course of the conversation he recalled and stated almost verbatim parts of the conversation we had had before. He claimed that he had been thinking over what was said, and that he could definitely not bring himself to confront his boy. The only actual proof available for defending the validity of the single encounter is offered in the second meetings.

Frankl stresses the importance of responsibility in therapy and argues that this is the very essence of human existence. The individual is responsible not to life

in general, but to specific opportunities. "What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. . . . Logotherapy tries to make the patient fully aware of his responsibility; and therefore it must leave to him the option for what, to what or to whom, he understands himself responsible."<sup>13</sup>

William Glasser, like Frankl, stresses the importance of responsibility in the life of the patient. Therapy is successful, in Glasser's estimation, when the patient recognizes his need to cope with the reality that exists within his own world. The author of Reality Therapy covers the purpose of an intensive single encounter ministry also when he writes, "A therapy that leads all patients toward reality, toward grappling successfully with the tangible and intangible aspects of the real world, might accurately be called a therapy toward reality, or simply Reality Therapy."<sup>14</sup>

It will be helpful to consider the basis for Glasser's therapeutic approach and the principles on which he operates. First, he clearly points out that individuals

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>14</sup>William Glasser, Reality Therapy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 6.



who require assistance in confronting reality are like every other human being in that they have basically the same needs to be fulfilled. That is, every person needs to be involved with other people, preferably with at least one person who is in touch with reality. Glasser's following statement indicates why an intensive encounter ministry could become a significant act in the lives of many persons. "Unless a patient becomes actively involved with at least one person in a better way than he is now involved with anyone, he will be unable to fulfill his needs. Well-meaning advice always fails--patients can't straighten up and fly right when someone points out reality to them when there is not sufficient involvement. Without it no one can be helped to help himself fulfill his needs."<sup>15</sup>

Glasser claims that the individual must maintain a satisfactory mode of behavior in order to meet and fulfill his needs. If his behavioral standards fall short and he is unable to evaluate his conduct, the person will lose his sense of worthwhileness. This lack of character will drive a person to seek out someone to fulfill his basic needs; among those needs will be the immediate need to care and be cared for. The person, then, must find a way to experience involvement--first with the therapist and then

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

with others. When this particular need has been met, the person will be in a position to begin to face the realities in his immediate environment.

The patient must be encouraged within the counseling session to remain in the present and not center his thoughts on past experience. "It is not only possible, it is desirable to ignore his past and work in the present because, contrary to almost universal belief, nothing which happened in his past, no matter how it may have affected him then or now, will make any difference once he learns to fulfill his needs at the present time."<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis upon the now which is characteristic of Reality Therapy would also be essential within the intensive encounter. The time element, of course, limits the amount of information which will be evoked within the brief interchange. Glasser states emphatically that the patient does not have to focus on past experience and that he is capable of fulfilling his need apart from an introspective orientation. When the person lapses into the past, it is the responsibility of the therapist to correct this tendency.

For Glasser the encounter provides the opportunity to communicate to the patient in a "relatively short,

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

intense period," and to point out that he is caught up in an irresponsible spiral, and that this negative response to life must be dealt with in the present moment. But whereas Glasser advocates a teaching step to the Reality approach, the intensive encounter relies upon the experience itself to carry the impact of concern. Reality Therapy, however, is primarily concerned with achieving a significant relationship with the patient. Glasser indicates that this step in itself is a crucial phase of therapy. He writes, "The guiding principles of Reality Therapy are directed toward achieving the proper involvement, a completely honest, human relationship in which the patient, for perhaps the first time in his life, realizes that someone cares enough about him not only to accept him but to help him fulfill his needs in the real world."<sup>17</sup>

Self-transcendence, as opposed to self-actualization, in Frankl's estimation, is the true medium by which we come to understand the real aim of existence. He contends that self-actualization is limited to the inner world of man and it becomes a closed system for understanding one's place in life, whereas self-transcendence allows man to discover his position in the world. A clergyman wearing a clerical collar willing to encounter the

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

individual on his own terms may provide the kind of experience that is needed for the person to discover an element of self-transcendence.

For example, the business man between flights at the airport may be very susceptible to an intensive encounter. In the waiting room or cocktail lounge he may be far enough removed from his business world and family responsibilities to be capable of reaching a third level of meaning. That is, the encounter may provide the opportunity to achieve a new perspective with respect to his home and work world.

Truman Douglass suggests that a brief encounter within the proper setting might provide an opportunity for a person to experience a degree of self-transcendence. Douglass, in discussing the future of man's environment in a book entitled The New World of Urban Man, comments on the opportune interlude that presents itself in the world of transportation. Douglass refers to a book he had read.

In it the author chose as a kind of symbol and epitome of modern man what he called "the man on the bus" (he might today be the man on the train).

The author described the disparate worlds between which this man moves; the one is the world of the family where it would be noticed if somebody else turned up at 6:30 pm--the other is the world of industry where is more or less an interchangeable, replaceable part.

During the bus ride (or train ride) the man has a chance, so to speak, to stand above these two worlds,

to try to understand himself in them, to bring them into some coherent system of meaning.

At what other time in the modern world does man have that chance? The journey between home and office is one of the few opportunities for psychic solitude.<sup>18</sup>

The church must discover the key places for encountering the urban man "between worlds." Douglass adds, "What we have to do in every area of the city is to create the opportunity for contacts between people. The problem is not to change people's way of life, but rather to give them more opportunities."<sup>19</sup>

#### Symbolic meaning of the collar

I have found in my experience with single encounters that often an individual is ready to focus on a specific issue or concern at the very outset of the conversation, and that that particular topic in the encounter ultimately causes the person to become rather anxious. The person, then, approaches the clergyman with a specific topic in mind, a topic that involves an existential concern. Faber and Schoot, co-authors of The Art of Pastoral Conversation, deal with the images that are evoked by the clergy. They comment on the layman's expectations of a minister under

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<sup>18</sup>Constantinos Doxiadis and Truman Douglass, The New World of Urban Man (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1965), pp. 93-94.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

normal pastoral conditions, and I believe these same role expectations are present in some form within the intensive encounter environment.

Perhaps I can add here that, of course, we as pastors also fill a predetermined role in the eyes of those with whom we come in contact. This means that the other man approaches us with definite expectations. Thus it can be a disappointment to him if at a certain moment we do not play our part as he expected it whatever the reason and, for example, do not say a prayer. A clear understanding of our role, of our task as pastors, is necessary for every conversation in which we take part plus an image of that role which the other man expects from us--and perhaps even fears. I would add here that circumstances can arise in which the pastor has to ask himself whether he can go through with the part he is expected to play.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to consider the impact that may be created by the clerical collar at the very outset of the meeting. Faber and Schoot allude to the response that the pastor elicits through his clerical position.

Who turns to the pastor does something different from the person who turns to the social worker, psychologist, or pastor stands for, symbolizes, represents, the christian community, Christ, God. Of course, the person whom he meets may not have realized this consciously--perhaps there are only vague feelings and associations. But these can be very important for the conversation. The symbolic meaning which the pastor has for a person can bring with it many difficulties and possibilities.<sup>21</sup>

The symbolic impact present within the secular

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<sup>20</sup>Heije Faber and Ebel van der Schoot, The Art of Pastoral Conversation (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 43.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

setting may differ, to some extent, from that stimulated within the pastor's office, but the difference may not be so great when we consider the fact that the intensive encounter ministry is dependent upon persons approaching the clergyman. The individual who takes the initiative to encounter the minister in the secular place perhaps approaches the collar in a manner similar to that of a churchman seeking out his pastor. This is not to imply that all of those who tend to initiate conversation with the minister in a bar would have had church backgrounds, but I would say, however, that a majority of those who have approached me in this ministry have had some past experience with the church.

The person, as Faber and Schoot indicate, may not be conscious of the fact that he responds to the collar, but the clerical garb no doubt causes the individual to react to some aspect of the Christian faith at the moment he decides to move toward the clergyman.

The clerical collar, then, may trigger something with the individual causing him to do business with his relationship to God, the church, or man. The minister's role merely acts as an "exciter" at this stage of the encounter. Faber and Schoot's analysis of the parishoner's response to the pastor and internal conflicts which are bound to be evoked may be directly applied to the

feelings that must be experienced by the individual who decides to approach the clergyman outside the church.

Many earlier experiences with the church, all sorts of religious notions, ideas, fears, expectations with regard to God, are involved when he turns to the pastor. We may say that on the one hand the parishoner comes with already existing and clear-cut expectations; on the other hand we bring them to life, correct them or extinguish them by the manner in which we are indeed "reference" for the other person to God.<sup>22</sup>

By wearing a clerical collar and sitting at a bar the minister is not trying to cause a dramatic response to the church. In fact, the more casual and integral the clergyman can appear in these settings the more significant will be the response to him. The minister will not attempt to impose or thrust the collar upon those present by becoming overly active. The clerical garb itself offers all that is necessary to attract attention. Buber, in referring to "the signs" that challenge our lives, reveals that a subdued sign can evoke a response.

The signs of address are not something extraordinary, something that steps out of the order of things, they are just what goes on time and again, just what goes on in any case, nothing is added by the address. . . . Thus, then, unexpectedly I seem to have fallen into the company of augurs, of whom, as is well-known, there are remarkable modern varieties.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 11.



Encounter with the clerical collar may evoke feelings that have to do with confession or absolution. Confession under these circumstances would differ from a catharsis in the therapeutic sense in that the collar is likely to cause the individual to want to confess his sins before God. Confession, however, will provide a cathartic effect wherein the person is relieved of inner conflict long enough to gain a new perspective with respect to his present condition and thereby experience a degree of self-acceptance.

The single encounter may provide the opportunity which is needed to interrupt a cycle of "sinful bondage."

Confessional conversation may be a help to overcome constraint and bondage. The person who struggles with serious sins in his life can have a very strong feeling of not being free. He feels that time and time again he does the same things in spite of himself. Regularly he is overcome by it. Sometimes he even experiences it as if he has the will to do differently but is unable to. In situations such as these the confessional conversation may help to overcome this constraint and bondage.<sup>24</sup>

I would add here that perhaps the anonymous never-to-be-seen-again opportunity afforded in a bar between clergyman and patron will provide the atmosphere needed for effective confessional conversation.

Within the single encounter ministry there will

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<sup>24</sup>Faber, op. cit., p. 198.

also be a time when a blessing will be in order. There have been occasions when individuals on the street have approached me with a request to bless them or to offer a prayer. On several occasions persons have stopped me so that they might merely touch my hands. On one occasion, for instance, a person stopped me on the sidewalk, clasped both my hands in his, and said, "My name is Bill Smith. B-I-L-L S-M-I-T-H. I am a caddy at a golf course here in Los Angeles, and I would appreciate your blessing." Without waiting for a reply, he immediately turned and walked on. Faber claims,

The blessing consists of spoken words (which can vary depending on the situation and which preferably are taken from the Bible and liturgical tradition) and an act (the hands are laid on the head). The latter is in the first place a symbolic expression of the communion of God with this person. . . . The laying on of hands also symbolizes dedication to God, the person on whom the hands are laid is thereby dedicated to God.<sup>25</sup>

#### Jesus' single encounter ministry

Robert Leslie's book, Jesus and Logotherapy, deals with Jesus' ministry in light of Viktor Frankl's approach to logotherapy. By using a case study technique to understand the personal ministry of Jesus, Leslie enables us to relate the New Testament ministry of Jesus to the

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 206-207.

intensive single encounter approach.

The Zacchaeus encounter, for example, indicates how an intensive single engagement can stimulate a lonely and isolated person and cause him to respond through involvement. Harry Stack Sullivan, writes Leslie, would contend that Zacchaeus, before his confrontation with Jesus, had been functioning within a "security operation" level of response. Man, within this limitation, is caught in a behavioral pattern that protects him from becoming intimately involved with others. Zacchaeus' sudden encounter with Jesus broke through this barrier. "The dominant note in this incident centers in change. Regardless of what put Zacchaeus in his predicament, he did not have to stay there. Irrespective of the conditioning influences of his past life, his future life could be and did become different."<sup>26</sup>

Jesus encountered Zacchaeus under unusual circumstances, and yet the meeting point was a place conducive to change. Jesus did not try to maneuver the person to another location, or establish a schedule whereby they could meet later on or consistently; he went immediately with Zacchaeus into the house.

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<sup>26</sup>Robert Leslie, Jesus and Logotherapy (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 29.

We have already noted that, like most people, Zacchaeus could not seek help openly. Even at a "teachable moment" when the circumstances were favorable, when he had taken the initiative and had, indeed, even risked ridicule in climbing up a tree, no change would take place unless an atmosphere conducive to change was created.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, Jesus had met Zacchaeus on the latter's own ground, and within a face-to-face, one-to-one atmosphere of acceptance. "How the dialogue was carried on in Zacchaeus' home we can never know, but we do know that a dramatic change took place."<sup>28</sup>

The rich young ruler is also a case study that reveals the level of intimacy that may be reached within the single encounter. The young ruler had taken the initiative by falling on his knees before Jesus and appealing to him for immediate action to relieve him of his agony. He had reached the point where he recognized his need to change, and he took it upon himself to admit this to a stranger. Jesus placed the conversation on a deeper level of confrontation by forcing the individual to face the question in the light of ultimate values and meanings. The individual confronted in the single encounter ministry may never move in the direction that is made apparent to him within the meeting, "but the counselor does not despair, for even as the seeker turns away sorrowfully, he

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

has been exposed once again to the assertion of the fundamental worthwhileness of life and to the possibility of involvement in it in a very personal way."<sup>29</sup>

### Dialogue of the "between"

Martin Buber's concept of dialogue--that of the "between"--offers a crucial definition for understanding the theological implications of the intensive encounter. Buber contends that the depth of man's human existence is not to be discovered in the individual, nor in the collective, but in the I-Thou relationship. It is a condition which happens; it is not contrived. "When two individuals 'happen' to each other, then there is an essential remainder which is common to them, but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. That remainder is the basic reality, the 'sphere of the between.'"<sup>30</sup>

The idea of the "between" would seem particularly important in the single encounter ministry, where the participants, unknown to each other, suddenly enter into dialogue. There is no knowledge of the individual prior to the encounter; therefore, the individuals must rely upon the interchange itself for knowledge of each other.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>30</sup>Martin Buber, The Knowledge of Man (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 17.

The single encounter has to be understood as a valid Christian experience capable of "mobilizing the defiant power of the human spirit" (Leslie's chapter title) and penetrating the underlying power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, I can recall a situation where a soldier, who said later that he had contemplated suicide, arrogantly struck up a conversation with me. I did not try to imply that I knew what he was feeling, but I did feel a sense of investment in the interaction, and I felt responsible for the element of relationship we were establishing in those moments together. I did not feel directly responsible as a person for his personhood. I had no investment in his individualness, because I had no knowledge of or prior experience with his individuality apart from our present "relationship." "The real determinant of the primary word in which a man takes his stand is not the object which is over against him but the way in which he relates himself to that object. I-Thou is the primary word of relation. It is characterized by mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity, and ineffability."<sup>31</sup>

We have endeavored to lay open the foundations for

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<sup>31</sup>Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 57.

the Single Encounter and to describe its internal qualities in counseling terminology. Within the psychological realm we sought to point out the characteristics of reality and responsibility that are present within the intensive encounter. On the theological side we stressed the importance of the clerical collar and the significance of Jesus' ministry in light of the Single Encounter approach.

In summary, the intensive single encounter differs from the therapeutic approaches of Viktor Frankl and William Glasser in the sense that the clergyman by wearing the collar is deliberately signifying that he represents the resources, understanding, and support of the Christian tradition, and that these are available to the person in need in that instance. The minister who intends to function on the single encounter principle must discover a way to become extra-sensitive to those he encounters. The clergyman must allow the individual the freedom to be himself and at the same time be able to confront the person as a concerned priest.

The single encounter experience needs to be recognized for the quality of meaningfulness produced in the moment. This is not to suggest that future consequences would have less meaning for a potential relationship, but that under certain circumstances each meeting will be of

greater worth if it is treated as something complete in itself.

The successful intensive single encounter, in effect, then, is an interval of conflict that will hopefully interrupt an habitual pattern of irresponsible behavior in a person's life and cause him to reflect within the encounter itself on his condition. The minister may gradually learn how to measure the individual's response to that interruption in the meeting itself by becoming a responsible participant in the person's conflict at the moment.

The minister approaches the single encounter ministry by setting himself up to be used. By making himself available on the individual's own terms and his own ground, the clergyman earns the right to suddenly force the crisis and bring the other person into a state of conflict.



## CHAPTER IV

### A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

One of the most important characteristics of the single encounter approach is the attitude the minister exhibits within the secular community. It is crucial for the minister to impress upon others that he is satisfied with merely being present and that he is willing to let an intensive single encounter be a by-product of the ministry of presence.

By being "present" in the city the clergyman is in a better position to learn about the urban man and the nature of city life, and at the same time he has placed himself in a position to encounter individuals face to face. The minister's task may be merely to sit silently alongside a senior citizen in a hotel lobby for two hours to begin to feel and identify with the elderly.

#### A learning interval

The church has attempted to break into the various apartment house complexes by applying techniques to stimulate the interests of the occupants and encourage them to become involved with the church. An article by S. C. Kincheloe entitled "Major Reactions of City Churches" indicates the aggressive posture that is being exhibited

in the city by the church. He writes:

The conscious changes which churches are making are closely related to the changes which are taking place in other city institutions, including business. There is the use of the telephone, the radio, the motion picture, printed materials, and increased advertising. Churches build staffs of specialists to meet the particular demands of their situations. Techniques for securing the attention and interest of the apartment house dweller are devised.<sup>1</sup>

The apartment house techniques often amount to merely finding better ways to announce church outings or passing out printed material encouraging participation in a gathered community at the church or in the apartment building. Seldom have we sought to meet the occupant where he is and in the frame of mind in which we happen to find him. Possibly we have moved too quickly in our adaptation to the latest devices of communication by failing to assume a listening or learning stance. If so, we have bypassed a crucial phase of evangelism in the urban complex--that of presence. Finding ways to ascertain the moods and dispositions of the apartment house dweller are overlooked, and consequently the techniques applied to apartment living by the church do not include a learning interval.

Perhaps the churchman needs to be present with the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Lee, Cities and Churches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 102.

apartment house occupant in locations besides his dwelling place. For example, it is often possible to learn more about a person at the bars and restaurants he frequents. The church needs to spend some time exposing itself to the occupant with little or no thought of how to get him aroused and into a small group. It also needs to meet the person with no thought of "helping" him. Being a listener would mean that the clergyman would try to avoid initiating the conversation and would be open to meeting. He would not attempt to structure the meeting, but he would endeavor to become a part of the existing structures.

Gibson Winter, in discussing the role of the laity in performing this service, reveals why it has been difficult to establish any definite forms of evangelism in the church when he says:

The underlying thesis of these considerations is that the world is radically changed; a wholly new relationship of church to world is called for in our time. This new relationship can be described as the servanthood of the laity. Here indeed we encounter the real division among Christians today: one group feels that the world has not changed in any fundamental sense and that the churches should go about their work as usual; the other group is convinced that the contemporary world has a new universe of meaning, a radically different social structure and problems peculiar to its own time.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to oppose the need to emphasize the

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<sup>2</sup>Gibson Winter, The New Creation as Metropolis (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 33.

role of the laity which Winter sets forth but to suggest that there is also a place for the clergyman in clerical collar in determining the change that is taking place between the church and the modern world. The church must discover the reactions that may be stimulated by the clergyman in the world, and there would seem no better way to do this than to have the clergy experience firsthand the world's response to the church. The clergy is seldom in a position to learn face-to-face what the urban man feels toward the church. The church has always approached the unbeliever thinking that it knows precisely how the latter experiences life and exactly what is needed to give meaning to his existence.

The churchman must divorce his thoughts completely from traditional rural images of community--often held to be the only Christian concept of community--in order to begin to recognize the importance of the existing communities in the urban world. A secular community, for example, may be providing the only setting available for the young adult to encounter meaning in his city life. A small hamburger stand on a busy downtown street can offer a meaningful atmosphere of fellowship for the lonely young adult. Peter Berger, professor of Social Ethics, writes concerning the need for the churchman to consider new forms of community. "If we can imagine agape as a

principle underlying empirical communities, we will have to imagine these communities as radically different from the normal social forms, not only in modern but in any society."<sup>3</sup>

The institutional church needs to recognize the fact that the city contains significant communities which are capable of providing opportunities for individuals to encounter elements of agape. It is meaningless to attempt to withdraw individuals from secular fellowships with the intention of placing them in local church activities. What will be gained in uprooting an individual from his limited group life and placing him in a congregation whose members only frequent the church site on Sundays? These conditions and modes of relationship are discovered only through a patient and non-aggressive exposure to the various establishments.

Truman Douglass claims that many of our metropolitan ministers may lack any

real understanding of the interior character of their community and be fundamentally hostile to its ways and values. I know eminent New York ministers who seldom touch the city in any of its most sensitive areas, where the shape and promise of the future are taking form. Their associations are mainly with people who use the city, vocationally and economically, but whose vital concerns are for the most part outside its life. These people collect the financial rewards

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<sup>3</sup>Lee, op. cit., p. 71.

the metropolis offers but detach themselves from its real life and problems. So do many ministers. They make their pastoral calls by chauffeur-driven car or taxi--never by subway, assuredly one of our most remarkable cultural institutions.<sup>4</sup>

Douglass also suggests that city churchmen develop a moralism about urban life that causes them to overlook the real nature of the city. They consider the "anonymity" of city life a dehumanizing feature of the modern world, failing to see the gift of privacy that is afforded by this trend of the inner city. The city is thought to be a "monument to materialism" and a serious threat to a meaningful existence. Douglass points out that the urbanite acquires a degree of asceticism in order to combat the noise and crowded conditions of the city. In this special "ascetic response" to life the city person cherishes going to the theatre, concerts, museums, etc. It is his way of adapting to the "dehumanizing" effects of urban living. The church must discover ways to appreciate the urbanite's behavior and response to the city rather than find ways to counteract what appear to be destructive characteristics of urban life.

#### Interval of "presence"

Roman Catholic priests in France, following the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

Second World War, sought to evangelize the country through "engagement" with the mine workers who were no longer in contact with the church. The phrase "Christian presence" was coined about this time, and a serious experimental ministry was undertaken in order to establish communication with the working classes. "We no longer speak of this encounter as a 'communication to', but as 'communication with' the non-Christian, i.e., not as a confrontation but as a conversation (remembering that the Latin root of this word is conversari, 'to live with')."5

The Student Christian Movement has recently adopted the phrase "Christian presence" to indicate its proposed stance in the modern world. A theological discussion on the term is presented in an issue of the Student World quarterly journal. The phrase was selected in order "to express both the centre of the Christian faith and our response to it."6 The statement proposed by the General Committee included the following definition: "'Presence' for us means 'engagement', involvement in the concrete structures of our society. It indicates a priority. First, we have to be there before we can see our task

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5Philip Potter, "Christian Presence," Student World, LVIII:3 (1965), 209.

6Ibid., p. 210.

clearly. In one sense of the word, presence precedes witness. In another sense, the very presence is witness."<sup>7</sup>

The traditional expressions such as "evangelism," "mission," and "witness" imply a quality of presence that calls for an over-againstness or an aggressive position, and consequently these words suggest "a Christian behavior of speaking before listening, of calling people away from their natural communities into a Christian grouping, and of a preoccupation with the soul at the expense of the whole life."<sup>8</sup>

A communique issued in recent years by the Catholic bishops of France emphasized the absence of the church in the labor world and the technological movement of the day. In order to begin to discover a posture for genuine presence, the French Catholic had to become aware of the church's attitudes (attitudes that are sure to be present in the American tradition) that were tending to block lines of communication with the world. The church first had to admit to a biased collective attitude which it had been holding against the unchurched, viz., the attitude that each person is responsible for his own beliefs, and therefore if the individual does not believe, the church is not responsible for that person. Atheism was considered to be

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 211.



immoral--a viewpoint which tends to make the lines between the church and the world even more distinct.

Another confident attitude held by the churchman that was inclined to remove the possibilities of achieving dialogue between the church and the world had to do with the church's role in the social conditions (a factor which is becoming increasingly more central to the United States church). Poor living conditions were thought to be dechristianizing the labor world of France and in turn keeping the worldly from entering the church. Solutions for meeting these deprived social conditions were laid out by the church, but unfortunately the spiritual renewal did not go beyond the gesture of social action.

Gradually the church has realized the need to understand the process of "dechristianization" or "secularization" and overcome the temptation to confront the world with the desire to encounter it. "We are in such spiritual solidarity with a world in movement that we can no longer speak vitally and materially of today's world in terms of otherness. We are not going into the world: we are there."<sup>9</sup>

Colin Williams, in his book What in the World?, calls attention to the recent shifts in congregational

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

forms and warns us that the church is facing a major "space" problem. He asks, how will the church find ways to witness at those points in life where man makes his primary decisions? The church in the past was central to the community and therefore encountered man at his decision-making moments in life, but today the church finds itself on the fringe of man's life.

The church, which has taken its space for granted now must rediscover its place in the new worlds of modern human relationships in order to discover how to witness to the Lordship of Christ in the non-residential worlds in which he has yet found no room. . . . And now the need for the church to find a place in these new worlds, is the need to find a way to witness to Christ as the Lord not just of time but of space also.<sup>10</sup>

A ministry of presence may become the means by which the church may begin to "rediscover its place in the new world of modern human relationships." The results of an attempted ministry of presence can be illustrated by an experience the author had recently with a trust company employee in the inner city. The illustration is intended to point out the need for the minister to be satisfied with the act of merely being present. While having lunch at a small downtown restaurant near the city's business section, a well-dressed business executive seated next to

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<sup>10</sup>Colin Williams, What in the World? (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1964), pp. 16, 18.

me initiated a conversation that gradually led to a serious discussion concerning his business affairs. Mr. Jones was a trust officer for a large firm, and his duties frequently required him to deal with trust funds involving emotionally distraught family members. After our conversation Jones indicated that the discussion had been very meaningful, and he invited me to lunch the following week.

On the next meeting we discussed the significance of the "ministry of presence" in which I was engaged. Following our luncheon I was invited to his office where I was introduced to several of his co-workers. On this occasion Jones urged me to review with him a trust fund case which, because of the unusual circumstances within the family, had caused Jones considerable concern. We have recently decided to schedule weekly meetings in order to discuss those cases which tend to put an emotional strain on Jones in his work. The trust officer indicated later that he was willing to pursue a relationship because I had given the impression that our initial conversation was worthwhile in itself and that I was not pressing him to move in a specific direction.

J. C. Hoekendijk, author of The Church Inside Out, calls for a diversified approach in discovering where the urbanite may be encountered. He suggests that the church must be patient in its efforts to reach modern man. "The

primary thing that is asked of us in this respect is presence, to be there, serving without ulterior motives, and for the time being probably also without too many words."<sup>11</sup>

Another experience which illustrates the importance of a ministry of presence took place within a small hamburger stand in the derelict section of Los Angeles. After several weeks of merely patronizing the stand, I became acquainted with a middle-aged waiter who was obviously highly respected by the young adults who had made the stand a regular meeting place. One evening over twenty of the young adults were arrested on charges of using narcotics. Immediately following the arrest the waiter received numerous letters from the various inmates. With each letter the waiter became more emotionally involved with specific individuals, until finally he refused to open the letters addressed to him from the city jail.

On several occasions he urged me to read the letters he refused to read. Eventually I began to read the letters to him. Although I visited the young adults in the jail, I felt the most significant contribution to this ministry was made at the point of merely providing emotional support

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<sup>11</sup>J. C. Hoekendijk, The Church Inside Out (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 124.

for the waiter and encouraging him to read another letter.

Theodore Wedel assures us of the significance of a ministry of presence when he writes,

To realize the evangelizing power of mere "presence" is not easy for most of us. We are so accustomed to think of the call to spread the gospel as one demanding primarily some kind of verbal witness--talking to a neighbor about Jesus--that mere presence looks like shirking our witnessing task. Yet missionary experience can bring much testimony to bear that premature attempts to achieve conversions can do more harm than good.<sup>12</sup>

To summarize, a ministry of "presence" is only one step removed from that of "encounter." Only by first making himself present will the clergyman be in a position to truly encounter individuals. The church, in becoming engaged in a listening response to urban life, indicates to the community that it seeks first to know the individual and avoids the tendency to impose an attitude of superiority. In offering a ministry of presence it suggests to the urbanite that the church intends to overcome the image of speaking to the unchurched by finding ways to be with them.

By participating in a ministry of presence the clergyman endeavors to make himself "available" in the profoundest sense of the word. That is, he exposes himself

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<sup>12</sup>Theodore Wedel, The Gospel in a Strange New World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 117.

in a way that will indicate to others that the church, in the form of an individual, offers itself to those present on an unconditional basis.

Thus, the witness of the Church is inseparable from serving presence. Not by directing and gathering, but by risking and abonding itself to men does the Church proclaim the Lordship of Christ. The true Church does not exist apart from poverty, sacrifice, and death. Unseen humility and lowliness are inseparable from the being and the mission of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas Wieser, Planning for Mission (New York: World Council of Churches, 1966), p. 124.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

The church needs to appreciate the limitations imposed upon man and the freedom offered him through the latest architectural and technological advancements of the modern age. A careful and thorough examination of present and possible future trends of urban life and its web of relationships must be undertaken at the local church level. To what extent, for example, does the design and policy of a modern business establishment allow for meaningful human contact within an employee's workday? Is it possible for the church to encounter the urban man at a personal and significant level during his working hours, or does the church tend to disturb the network of public involvement by endeavoring to involve itself in the business world? It has been the custom of the church to offer an opportunity for fellowship during the weekday lunch hour, but perhaps there are opportunities for meeting the urban man, briefly, within his working hours.

The willingness on the part of the church to become engaged in a ministry of presence will determine the degree to which the church will be in a position to discover new possibilities for meeting the urban worker beyond the church building. But only after the church has realized

the basic sociological shift from the village life to the modern urban scene and accepted the fact that man is forced to rely, to some extent, upon brief encounters for satisfying his need for personal involvement will it begin to design its program to meet the urban man's total needs.

By referring to Marshall McLuhan's projections with respect to man in the "Electric Age," I have sought to take advantage of an idea that may, if expanded upon in the appropriate context, offer a challenging concept for understanding not only the shape of man's environment but man's response to that environment.

The radical characteristics of relating suggested in McLuhan's observations are features of urban life that need to be incorporated into the agendas of the long-range planning committees of the church. The observations may merely be used to furnish a curriculum study committee with a glimpse of possible future trends, but in a rapidly changing era a calculated risk based on new data may be a necessary step in the planning stages in order to gain the edge needed to adapt to the present conditions.

The established long-term programs existing within the church, especially within the inner city churches, need to be critically examined and revised to include an overall urban strategy. The strategy ought to include an ecumenical philosophy which seeks to recognize the need for



single encounter ministries operating in connection with various denominations. The strategy decided upon should allow the churchman (lay and clerical) the freedom to approach the unchurched on a ground other than that of the church site and to pursue avenues of evangelism that are not designed to route the constituent to the building.

The effectiveness of the counseling opportunities afforded by the intensive single encounter is restricted, of course, by the nature of the ministry itself. The data accumulated in this project is limited by necessity to single interviews with a minimum of follow-up opportunities. The results of the single encounter approach at this stage of the experimentation can merely be documented by relying upon subjective evidence. That is, the clergyman ultimately relies upon an element of personal opinion in reporting his interview. That opinion, however, can be supported by various psychological data and conclusions. The author, therefore, has endeavored to supplement personal interviews with psychological findings within the field of counseling.

By placing too much emphasis upon developing a measuring device to ascertain the efficacy of an intensive encounter, the endeavor will eventually lose its degree of spontaneity and, in turn, decrease the possibilities of engaging in significant dialogue. It will be necessary in

the future, however, to initiate an experimental program that will call for a larger number of single encounter experiences. Verbatim reports on the meetings could be compiled and conclusions drawn from the evidence accumulated.

Another area of investigation which would indirectly support the single encounter concept would be found in the field of communication. Movie or television viewing needs to be studied with regard to the effect of a single exposure on the viewer. For example, it may be advantageous to examine the literature surrounding the effect of instructional films in the field of education. There would also be value in examining the research material available in the area of learning theory and the effects of one-trial learning experiences. Within this category it may be possible, for instance, to measure the impact of the content of a single novel.

The basic approach to the single encounter mode of ministry may eventually be applied to other areas or sections of the city. In fact, a corps of chaplains might be assigned to the inner city, enabling individuals to assume responsibility for specific city blocks. The minister, by allowing his agenda to be set by the needs present, would gradually establish a ministry relevant to a particular setting. For example, a clergyman assigned to a

business section of the city might discover locations wherein it would be possible to encounter bankers, lawyers, secretaries, etc., for short periods of time. The minister assigned to a shopping area would perhaps find a convenient site in which to encounter shoppers, sales persons, merchants, etc.

An effective single encounter ministry could provide a form of evangelism which would allow the church to become directly involved with the unchurched on a level of understanding that would greatly benefit both participants. By recognizing and emphasizing the influence of single encounters within the life of the congregation, the church will begin to recognize the need for ministries that are not bound by long-term gathered images or programs restricted to the church building.

The urban man can no longer afford to be blinded by traditions that limit him only to closed circle relationships or to the established community. He must now begin to recognize the value of the commitment that can be reached in a fifteen-minute personal interchange.

Underlying the entire single encounter approach is the basic contention that the church needs to discover a practical mode of ministry that will indicate to the world that it is willing to be a servant. Gibson Winter states clearly the stance that needs to be taken by the

church. He writes, "In the churches today, ministry is usually taken to mean what a clergyman does in and for the religious organization. In the servant church, ministry is servanthood within the world."<sup>1</sup>

Winter claims that part of the urbanite's problem of disorganization in the American society can be attributed to a breakdown of communication--a breakdown which has caused a sense of aimlessness and a loss of meaning. The lack of communication between central cities and suburban areas, for example, has become a major problem in the twentieth century. "The ministry of reconciliation of the servant church is the restoration of communication to society. Love, in this sense, is open communication, and the ministry of love is the re-opening of communications."<sup>2</sup>

The single encounter ministry may offer the practical means by which lines of communication can begin to be re-opened and a servant ministry established in the urban setting.

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<sup>1</sup>Gibson Winter, The New Creation as Metropolis (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

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